Editorial
A Festschrift for William Shaffir: Guest Editors' Introduction

Antony J. Puddephatt (iD)
Lakehead University, Canada

Steven Kleinknecht (iD)
Brescia University College, Canada

Antony J. Puddephatt is a Professor of Sociology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Canada. He has published on the topics of symbolic interactionism, pragmatist social theory, the sociology of knowledge, the culture of competitive chess, environmental sociology, Canadian sociology, and open-access publishing. With William Shaffir and Steven Kleinknecht, he is a co-editor of *Ethnographies Revisited* (Routledge, 2009), and with Bradley Brewster, he is a co-editor of *Microsociological Perspectives for Environmental Sociology* (Routledge, 2018).

email address: apuddeph@lakeheadu.ca

Steven Kleinknecht is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Brescia University College. His qualitative research has focused on the computer hacker and Old Order Mennonite subcultures. With Lisa-Jo van den Scott and Carrie Sanders, he co-edited *The Craft of Qualitative Research: A Handbook* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2018), and with Antony Puddephatt and William Shaffir, he co-edited *Ethnographies Revisited* (Routledge, 2009).

email address: skleinkn@uwo.ca

It is a privilege to be guest editors for this special issue of *Qualitative Sociology Review,* a festschrift (intellectual celebration) of Dr. William Shaffir's (Billy's) contributions to symbolic interactionism and ethnographic research. Fittingly, the issue is comprised entirely of contributions from his students, each reflecting on how his mentorship helped teach them different aspects of qualitative field research and scholarship generally, paving the way for their own research projects and careers to evolve. Both of us, as guest editors for this special issue, are proud to be among Billy's students as well. As such, we share some of our own thoughts here and try to convey what makes him so special, especially to the interactionist qualitative research community in Canada. In this brief introduction, we hope to highlight some of the more central themes from the contributors' insightful articles. These include (a) Billy's influence on the development of symbolic interactionist research in Canada; (b) his personal approach to fieldwork; (c) his importance as a mentor and teacher; and, finally, (d) his philosophy of using and developing concepts in the field. Taken together, this collection of papers not only provides insight into the work and teachings of a central Canadian symbolic interactionist, but also has valuable lessons for those who practice and teach qualitative research.

William Shaffir is a central figure in the Canadian tradition of symbolic interactionism, as Jacqueline Low carefully documents in her paper, "The Hughesian Legacy: William Shaffir—A Principal Interpreter of the Chicago Diaspora in Canada." Indeed, Billy was the first recipient of a Sociology PhD at McGill University in 1972, where Chicago-styled sociology was brought to Canada. When Billy took a post at McMaster University, he infused the program with the ideas and research approach championed by lu-minaries such as Everett Hughes and Howard Becker, helping to create a symbolic interactionist hub at McMaster University (Helmes-Hayes and Milne 2018). This became the place for Canadian students of interactionist field research to study, and Billy was known as the key person to study with. His expertise was important, but so too was his natural charisma and warmth as a teacher and mentor to his students. Low makes the case that not only did Billy serve as the main conduit for Chicago-school teachings in Canada, but he was also important in developing the institution of interactionism in Canada through the *Qualitative Analysis Conference*, which has helped nurture interactionist scholarship for almost 40 years. It is no accident that many of the contributors here have put forward the notion that Billy is, in both a personal and professional sense, "our Hughes."

Billy's MA thesis and PhD dissertation, later published as a book (Shaffir 1974) on Chassidic Jews in Montreal, utilized a classic ethnographic field research approach with interviews and a heavy emphasis on spending time observing, building relationships, and participating within the group. He would use this immersive approach fruitfully throughout his career to understand Jews in Canada (e.g., Weinfeld, Shaffir, and Cotler 1981; Levitt and Shaffir 1987; Brym, Weinfeld, and Shaffir 1993; Shaffir 2011), especially their maintenance of ethnic and religious boundaries (e.g., Shaffir 1993; 1998; 2007). Yet his broadly interactionist approach to field research offered him the flexibility to explore a host of topics beyond ethnicity and religion. For example, he studied the professionalization of medical students (Haas and Shaffir 1977; 1982; 1987), the experience of political defeat (Shaffir and Kleinknecht 2005), the claims and counter-claims of racial profiling by the police (Satzewich and Shaffir 2009), as

well as broader themes in social psychology such as identity (Haas and Shaffir 1978) and deviance (Haas and Shaffir 1974). His belief that one had to get out of the library in order to learn about the empirical social world, combined with his love of discovering, meeting, and associating with people, led him to numerous field research projects.

Billy contributed a great deal to the theory and practice of ethnographic field research. He co-edited a number of volumes that would collect reflexive "fieldwork experiences" from well-known ethnographers (e.g., Shaffir, Stebbins, and Turowetz 1980; Shaffir and Stebbins 1991; Dietz, Prus, and Shaffir 1994; Pawluch, Shaffir, and Miall 2005; Puddephatt, Shaffir, and Kleinknecht 2009). In these books, the chapter authors would candidly share their personal, practical, and sometimes social and emotional challenges in the field. This was a refreshing change from stale, recipe styled manuals of qualitative research. Instead of treating the research process as formulaic, Billy's work emphasized the actualities of how fieldwork is accomplished in practice, as a deeply human and social process. Contributors to these volumes would discuss the various challenges of getting in, achieving rapport, managing emotions, handling conceptual problems, and eventually, exiting the field. Separate from his work in these edited volumes, he would also write personal accounts of his own fieldwork experiences, providing important practical lessons for others (e.g., Prus, Dietz, and Shaffir 1997; Shaffir 1999; 2018). Much of this was reflected in the way that he taught his students about field methods, as many of our contributors will show.

Billy's methodological lessons would have a major impact on his students, both through his writings and, perhaps even more centrally, through supervision of graduate students, and his famous grad-

uate level qualitative research seminar. Rather than merely absorbing the many methodological lessons provided, however, his students would build on his insights and search for their own methodological solutions to field research. Scott Grills, in his essay "The Virtue of Patience," argues that Shaffir's field methods encouraged the importance of "hanging around" for long periods of time instead of trying to rush through participant observation or interviews. Such a slow, patient ethnography is the only way to build genuine relationships with others in the field, take the time to acquire the necessary perspectives, and be able to recognize the meaning of what goes unstated in social settings. Andrew Hathaway, Rory Sommers, and Amir Mostaghim, in their article "Active Interview Tactics Revisited: A Multigenerational Perspective," show how Billy's focus on interpersonal relationships in qualitative research can be used to consider when and how researchers can make use of their social positions to challenge participants in an effort to dig beneath the surface. And Arthur McLuhan, in his article titled "Feigning Incompetence in the Field," demonstrates how in developing relationships with others in the midst of research, a "less than able self" is often important to convey in order to fit in, build trust, get better information from informants, and finally, leave the field. These contributions show the lasting relevance of Shaffir's practical, reflective understanding of field research as a deeply human, emotional, and relational process that is artfully put together over time.

Another common theme in this festschrift is the deep respect and admiration people have for Billy as a personal role model and mentor. This applies not only to how to conduct field research, but also how to handle oneself in the university, in the field, and with people generally. Efa Etoroma, in his article "Journeying into Academia via Immersion in Qualitative Research:

Professor Shaffir as a Master Guide," discusses how Billy encouraged him to study the Black community in Hamilton, and how his subtle but powerful supervisory style and memorable lessons inspired him to pursue his career in academia. Patient and approachable, Billy would calmly help to deal with research dilemmas as routine problems of the field, which once addressed squarely, could be dealt with. Similarly, in her article "The Gift of a Vocation: Learning, Writing, and Teaching Sociology," Sherryl Kleinman recounts her experiences learning from Billy during her MA studies at McMaster. She explains that Billy was a valuable mentor due to the fact that he would be very happy to treat students as colleagues, breaking down the boundaries of teacher and student to provide a good-natured and friendly source of professional socialization. It was about making students feel at home in contributing to research and demystifying scholarly pursuits as routine processes of work to help reduce anxiety. This would be important to her developing sense of what it meant to be a good student, scholar, and eventually a teacher herself. Billy's influence would also shape her later academic trajectory to learning from Howard Becker and then maintaining her faith in her own tenured appointment in a university context that was at times inhospitable to qualitative research. Billy's incredible warmth and sense of humor towards others, especially his students, cannot be overstated. He has influenced us in our conduct towards our own students in the classroom, colleagues and staff on campus, and research participants in the field. But, perhaps more importantly, Billy has helped to shape our more general character as (relatively more!) good-humored, decent, and compassionate human beings.

According to Billy's teaching philosophy, fieldwork methods, if anything, cannot be taught from a book. As Efa Etoroma points out, one cannot learn medita-

tion by reading about it; rather, it must be practiced. The same goes for field research. Legend has it that a common prop Billy would use in his qualitative methods classes was a yo-yo. He would demonstrate a series of tricks with it, explain how it works, and then ask the students if they could perform the same tricks. Of course not! The students would have to practice, make mistakes, and figure out how to do the tricks by trying out these skills themselves. Because every setting is different and poses its own unique challenges, personalities, and social rules, there is no one set "formula" for how to succeed in the field. Instead, the only way to learn is for the student to become immersed in the setting as soon as possible, learning about social life and their craft by spending as much time as possible with participants, adapting to the field as best they can through trial and error. Julian Torelli, the most recent of Billy's students, recounts in his article "Piecing Together the Meaning of 'Dirty Work,'" Billy's philosophy of learning by doing. He considers how his "traumatic introduction" to fieldwork was daunting, yet critical in shaping his qualitative research skills. Such a teaching philosophy, Torelli points out, assumes a deep respect for the students, having confidence in their ability to master their own chosen field-sites, and be trusted to find a conceptual hook that works. And this respect would have indirect benefits as well. Not only do students have the freedom to conduct inquiries as they see fit, they gain confidence in themselves while doing so, knowing they were empowered to make the choices they did.

Yet to try and position Billy as an instructor who would simply send his students into the field to figure things out for themselves would be a major disservice to him, as many of these contributors also emphasize. Instead of a "hands off approach," Billy conveyed a continual supportive presence in

the classroom and to his students, which instilled a faith that things would work out, a confidence in being able to solve problems, and an eye for what is most important. Reminiscent of Robert Merton's (1973) observation of the positive effects of the socialization of PhD scientists by Nobel laureates, Billy would instill confidence in his students. As a supportive and respected mentor, he would help his students develop an assured "sociological eye" (Hughes 1971), crucial in figuring out what is most important and promising, and what can be safely left behind. There are many stories of Billy taking students aside during difficult times in their research, gently leading them back to productive work. Certainly, both of us have benefitted from his gentle "pep talks" that allowed us to regain the confidence to "get back into it" in times of doubt and uncertainty.

On the topic of his knack for fostering the "sociological eye," Benjamin Kelly and Michael Adorjan reflect on Billy's delightfully ambivalent relationship to theory. In their paper titled "Agnostic Interactionism and Sensitizing Concepts in the 21st Century: Developing Shaffirian Theory-Work in Ethnographic Research," Adorjan and Kelly argue that Billy is a very insightful theorist, but often downplays this, and seems to practice what they call "theoretical agnosticism." Rather than allowing theoretical frames or concepts to force data collection unnaturally, concepts should only be employed long after the field is well-understood, and only then, if the concepts appear to really make sense. Like Jacqueline Low, Kelly and Adorjan compare Billy's approach to conceptualization to that of Everett Hughes, and to a lesser extent, Howard Becker. Like these inspirational figures, Billy agreed that one must be extremely careful with, and skeptical of, theoretical concepts if one is to be authentic to the empirical field site. It

is too easy to turn a would-be inductive exploration of a new social world into a sloppy application of an "in vogue" theory that only distorts the reality of that field and the participants' own experiences. Yet when patient enough (Grills, this volume), one can find the conceptual ideas that *do fit*, and are helpful not only in describing the behavior in the local site, but also offering generic comparisons to other realms of activity (Prus 1996).

For example, Jack Haas and William Shaffir (1977; 1982; 1987) applied Robert Edgerton's (1967) notion of the "cloak of competence" to their own study of medical students. While Edgerton used the concept to understand how developmentally disabled people would try to pass as "normal," they would analyze the same process in how medical students would try and stand out from their fellow students and impress their superiors at crucial moments to help hide their weaknesses. This concept ended up having legs, returning with Billy's collaboration with Arthur McLuhan and others to consider the possibility of the opposite notion being important as well: a "cloak of incompetence" (McLuhan et al. 2014).[1] And as discussed, Arthur McLuhan (this volume) builds on this concept again here in considering the importance of feigning incompetence as a path to success in field research.

If Billy did break from full agnosticism and hold some theoretical allegiance, it would surely be with classic pragmatist and interactionist thinkers. This would likely be due to their open-ended nature and flexibility for the field. Indeed, Torelli (this volume) demonstrates Billy's influence in introducing him to the ideas of William I. and Dorothy S. Thomas

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[1] See also Puddephatt, Kelly, and Adorjan (2005) for the various merits of "unveiling" the cloak of competence in graduate school.

(1928), as well as Everett Hughes (1971) and Herbert J. Gans (1972), to frame the problem of "dirty work" for homeless shelter workers. These theoretical influences emphasize attention to the "definition of the situation" put forth by actors on the ground, such that "dirty work" is seen as something that actors themselves define. Hence, this background set of theoretical assumptions operates mainly to guide the researcher and encourage an openness to participants' viewpoints on the ground.

In 2018, after 46 years of teaching, research, and service, Billy retired from McMaster University. His legacy as a symbolic interactionist scholar and field researcher, as well as a mentor *par excellence* to so many, is well-documented in the reflections that follow. His impact on his students is strong and enduring. While we cannot emulate his unique and specifically charismatic style, we can most certainly continue to impart his lessons. It has been an honor to assemble this festschrift and share some of Billy's influences with you, the reader. The greater privilege is to have studied with Billy and gotten to know him as a person. It may be a bold move to reach out to the *RateMyProfessors* website as part of concluding this introduction, but the following words from one of Billy's former undergraduate students convey well what it has meant for so many to know and learn from him:

He is the most pleasant human being on earth. He makes the world a better place for all those who come in contact with him on a day to day basis. He is the best professor in teaching and funniest guy ever. His jokes and stories will make you happy and cheer your mood. He is an incredibly fair person and he is very modest despite his achievements.

With Billy's retirement, others will continue to learn of his contributions and approach both through his writing and the transmission of his ideas through his past graduate students. This important mobilization of his ideas will continue, but is probably a poor substitute for experiencing Billy's personal teachings and mentorship first-hand. We hope this festschrift goes some distance to translating his students' mentorship experiences for others, in ways that convey Billy's unique contributions to research and teaching. We also hope that this volume provides possible "tricks of the trade" for others to learn from in both honing and teaching the craft of qualitative research for future students. Billy's ideas certainly continue to infuse our own approaches to teaching and research, and we strive to pass his lessons on to new generations. To be sure, we are better scholars, teachers, and people for having had the chance to study and learn from Billy. We hope this volume conveys some of the central lessons learned, such that others might benefit as we have so richly.

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Citation